



FAIRFAX COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

July 6, 2006

PUBLIC HEARING FOR PLANNING DETERMINATION

Pursuant to
Va. Code Sec. 15.2 - 2232

Public Hearing Date: July 20, 2006 at 8:15 p.m.

Application Numbers:	2232-B06-1
Applicant:	T-Mobile Northeast, L.L.C.
Proposed Use:	Telecommunications Facility
Subject Property:	59-3 ((1)) 0020
Supervisor District	Braddock
Size of Subject Property:	230 square feet
Application Received by:	Department of Planning and Zoning: January 5, 2006; revised June 21, 2006; amended July 6, 2006
Recommendation:	In accordance with Va. Code Sec. 15.2-2232, as amended, staff recommends that the Planning Commission find the proposal by T-Mobile Northeast, L.L.C., to install a telecommunications facility, located at 8333 Little River Turnpike, <u>not</u> to be substantially in accord with provisions of the adopted Comprehensive Plan.

BACKGROUND

T-Mobile Northeast, L.L.C. proposes to establish a telecommunications facility (nine (9) antennas on an existing tower and three equipment cabinets) for the existing 185-foot telecommunications tower located at Northern Virginia Community College, 8333 Little River Turnpike, Annandale.

SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT

Type of Structure Antennas Mounted On: 185' lattice tower

Antenna Number: 9 panel antennas

Antenna Dimensions: 53" height x 13" width x 3.1" depth

Antenna Placement: attached to the lattice tower at the 100' centerline

Equipment Cabinets: 3 cabinets (63.5" height x 51.2" width x 37" depth, each)

Equipment Cabinet Placement: on a 10' wide by 20' long concrete slab behind an 8' board-on-board fence, adjacent to the base of the telecommunications tower within a fenced compound

ANALYSIS

T-Mobile proposes in their application to install an unmanned wireless telecommunications link consisting of nine (9) antennas that will be mounted on an existing 185-foot telecommunications lattice tower at the 100-foot center line. The lattice tower is located at Northern Virginia Community College, 8333 Little River Turnpike, Annandale, Virginia. In addition to the antennas, T-Mobile proposes to install three (3) equipment cabinets (63.5" high x 51.2" wide x 37" deep) behind an 8-foot board on board fence that will be located within an existing chain link fenced compound, which is shown on Sheet Z-2 – Compound Layout and Tower Elevation of the T-Mobile Northeast, L.L.C. facility plan drawings prepared by Entrex Communications, Inc. dated June 20, 2006. The proposed equipment cabinets' location behind the 8-foot high board-on-board fence within the existing compound will reduce its visual impact on surrounding residential properties.

Although the lattice tower is located on property owned by the Commonwealth of Virginia, staff has confirmed that the tower is owned by SBC Tower Holdings, d/b/a New Cingular Wireless PCS, L.L.C. and was originally established by Cellular One. Neither staff nor the applicant has identified any record of the tower's formal approval under the County's 2232 Review process nor any record of a special exception approval by the Board of Supervisors which is required for a privately owned telecommunications tower to be located on land zoned to the R-2 (Residential, Two dwelling units per acre) District.

T-Mobile indicates that the proposed facility will function as a base transmission station for its wireless telecommunication network. T-Mobile's analysis of its network indicates that there are significant coverage problems along Little River Turnpike in this part of Fairfax County. The applicant has eliminated the need for a new telecommunications monopole or tower in the search area and employs an antenna and equipment cabinet configuration that minimizes the visual impact of the project on the surrounding property owners, but meets the network coverage objectives. The applicant has indicated that the facility will operate automatically 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and will not require personnel or hours of attendance. Maintenance

personnel will visit the site periodically for inspections and for repairs or modifications to the facility. (Attachment A)

Zoning Issues

The subject property is zoned to R-2 District. The Zoning Administration Division (ZAD) of the Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) has determined that the proposed use does not meet all Zoning requirements because the existing tower is located in the R-2 (Residential) Zoning District, does not have 2232 approval and requires a special exception approval. In that there is no evidence that the existing tower received such 2232 or special exception approval, it must be obtained before the facility can be established and enlarged. (Attachment B)

DIT Review

The Technology Infrastructure Division of the County's Department of Information Technology has determined that the proposed facilities are in harmony with the telecommunications portion of the Comprehensive Plan and meets or exceeds Federal Communications Commission Standards for emission levels at the site. (Attachment C)

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The subject property is located in Wakefield Chapel Community Planning Sector of the Annandale Planning District in Area I. There is no site specific text which applies to the subject property. The Comprehensive Plan map shows that the subject property is planned for public facilities, governmental, and institutional uses.

In the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, 2003 Edition, Policy Plan; Public Facilities Plan as amended through January 10, 2005, Mobile and Land-Based Telecommunication Services, General Guidelines; pages 37 through 39; the Plan states:

“Objective 4: Mitigate the impact of public facilities on adjacent planned and existing land uses...”

- Policy e. Ensure that site size and development conforms to all requirements of the Fairfax County Zoning Ordinance and exceeds site acreage requirements, as possible, to achieve maximum compatibility with surrounding land uses.”

In the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, 2003 Edition, Policy Plan; Public Facilities Plan as amended through January 10, 2005, Mobile and Land-Based Telecommunication Services, General Guidelines; pages 37 through 39; the Plan states:

“Objective 42: In order to provide for the mobile and land based telecommunication network for wireless telecommunication systems licensed by the Federal Communications Commission, and in order to achieve opportunities for the collocation of related facilities and the reduction of their visual impact, locate the network's necessary support facilities which include antennas, monopoles, lattice towers and equipment buildings in accordance with the following policies.

- Policy a. Avoid the construction of new structures by locating mobile and land-based telecommunication facilities on available existing structures such as building rooftops, telecommunication and broadcast poles and towers,

electrical utility poles and towers, and water storage facilities when the telecommunication facilities can be placed inconspicuously to blend with such existing structures...

Objective 43: **Design telecommunication facilities to mitigate their visual presence and prominence, particularly when located in residential areas, by concealing their intended purpose in a way that is consistent with the character of the surrounding area.**

Policy a. Disguise and camouflage the appearance of telecommunication facilities so as to resemble other man-made structures and natural features (such as flagpoles, bell towers, and trees) that are typically found in a similar context and belong to the setting where placed;...”

Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, 2003 Edition, Policy Plan; Public Facilities, as amended through January 10, 2005; Mobile and Land-Based Telecommunications Services, Feature Shown Guidelines; pages 39 through 41; the Plan states:

“Objective 44: **With Planning Commission approval, consider mobile and land-based telecommunication facilities to be located on existing or replacement structures a “feature shown” of the Comprehensive Plan to be processed without a public hearing when placed in conformance with the following policies:**

Policy a. Locate telecommunication facilities on existing buildings and structures at the following properties:...

- institutional and quasi-public property (as defined under Section 2-514 of the Zoning Ordinance)...

Policy c: In determining that proposed telecommunication facilities are a feature shown of the Comprehensive Plan, ensure that the following general factors are met:

- the proposed installation has no material adverse impact on the visual quality or character of the general area in which it is to be placed including any surrounding residential properties;
- the proposed installation is located and designed to blend with the structure on which it is placed such as flush-mounting antennas or screening the antennas and equipment as appropriate to the site;...
- related equipment cabinets or shelters located on the ground or on a rooftop should be appropriately screened or placed to obscure their visibility from surrounding properties;...”

LOCATION, CHARACTER AND EXTENT

T-Mobile’s application will employ an antenna and equipment cabinet configuration that is collocated on an existing privately-owned structure on public property and minimizes the visual impact of the T-Mobile use on the surrounding area, in conformance with Policy Plan objectives.

However, because there is no evidence that the existing tower has received prior Fairfax County approvals under the County's Zoning and Comprehensive Plan processes, the tower has not been evaluated for compatibility with the site and surrounding neighborhood. In addition, the proposal fails to meet Plan policies to ensure that development conforms to all requirements of the Fairfax County Zoning Ordinance. Without formal approvals being granted for the tower on which the T-Mobile facility will be located, staff can not recommend that the use be further expanded or intensified.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Department of Planning and Zoning staff conclude that the subject proposal by T-Mobile to establish a telecommunications facility on an existing lattice tower located at the Northern Virginia Community College property, 8333 Little River Turnpike, fails to satisfy guidelines of the Comprehensive Plan as required in Va. Code Sec. 15.2 – 2232. Therefore, staff recommends that the Planning Commission find application 2232-B06-1 not to be substantially in accord with provisions of the adopted Comprehensive Plan.

JPZ:DBM:ALC